

THE FAIRY
OF
THE BIRCH TREE.

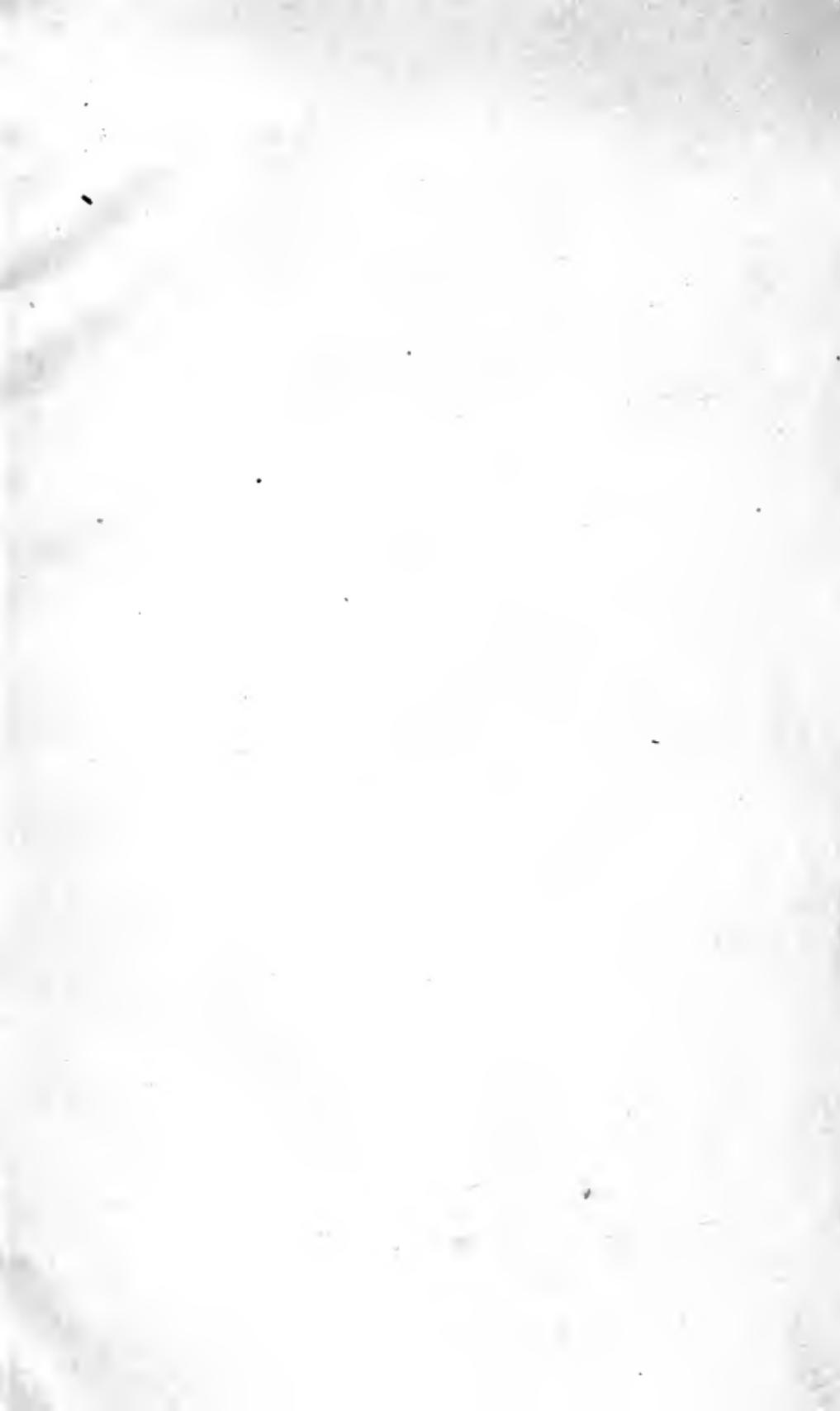
A Tale
FOR CHILDREN.

LONDON:
JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.
1856.

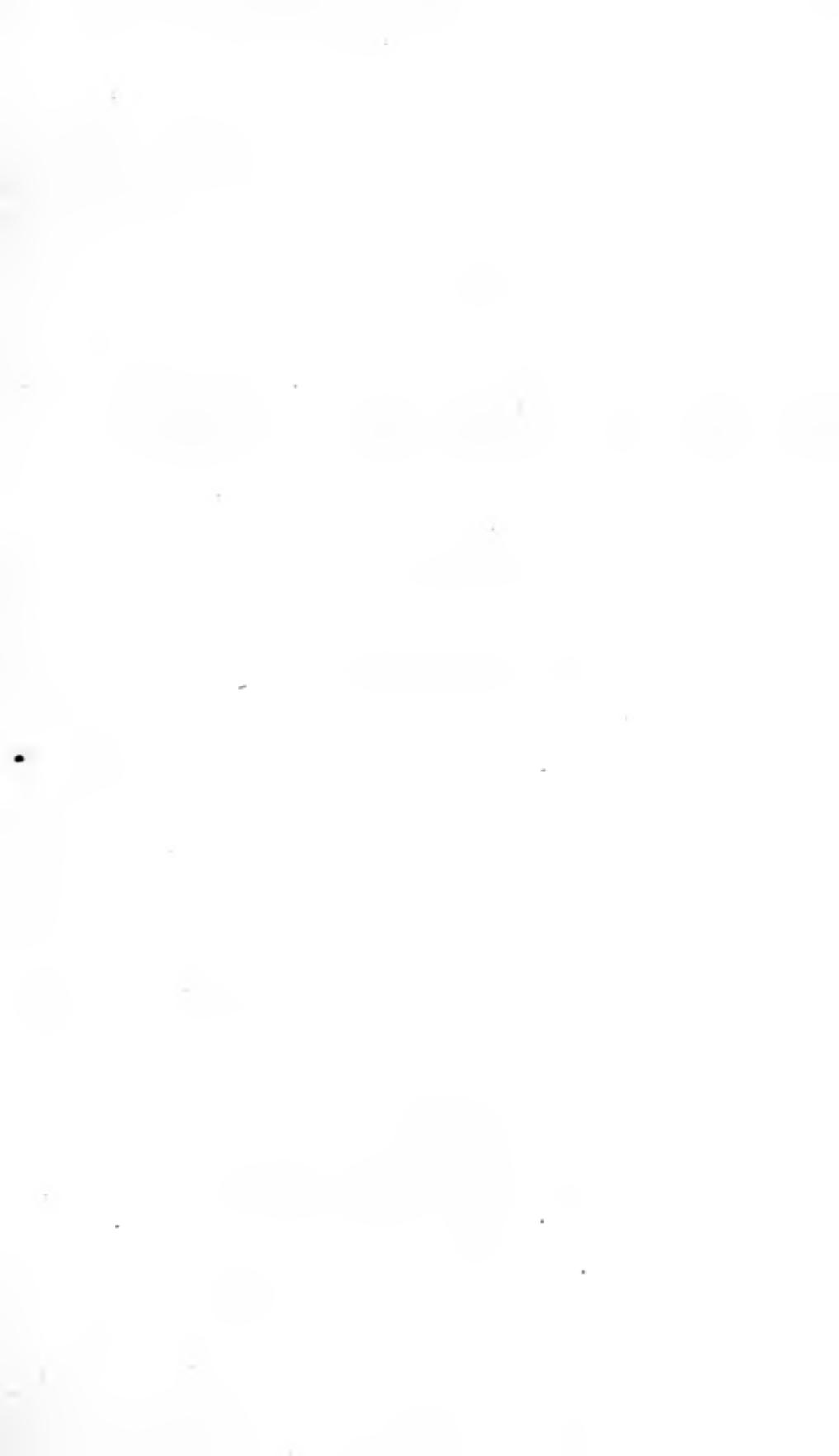
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THERE was once upon a time an ancient castle, with a beautiful park surrounding it, the abode of a wealthy Prince and Princess. They were young, and had an only child, a lovely little girl, whose name was Veronica. No fairies were invited to her christening, for the best of reasons, that none had been seen in the neighbourhood for many years. In the memory of some of the old people who lived near the castle, time was, when the forest abounded with the little elves, but they had all left the place on a sudden, owing, as it was said, to an affront which had been offered to their Queen, by the late owner of the castle. Thus little Veronica had no fairy godmother. She was a good child, and very fond of her home. She used to wander about the park and forest, with

no companion but her dog, and when tired, she rode home on his back. One day, going into the park as usual, she sat down to rest under a spreading Birch tree, and fell asleep. When she awoke, she found herself in a lovely palace. The walls were covered with brilliant silver, and little branches hung from the roof with emerald leaves, and a bright light at the tip of each leaf. The room was round, no doors or windows were to be seen, whilst a fresh breeze stirred the branches, making the tiny lights sparkle, reflected a thousand times by the silver walls. Veronica rubbed her eyes, and walking about, tried to persuade herself that she was in a dream. All at once she perceived that a change had come over her. Fairy-like, she felt that she could fly. In an instant, to her surprise, she sprang up, and found herself high in the pointed roof, where the songs of many birds came sweetly on her ear.

“This must be Fairy Land,” exclaimed Veronica, as she alighted on the soft carpet of bright green moss. But still she had seen no fairies. Sitting down upon a couch of grey

lichen, on a golden mushroom before her, she found spread by invisible hands, a dainty feast.

The tail of a Mayfly, the foot of a Gnat,
And then a small dish full of Midges so fat;
Some Butterflies wings, with fresh dew for the sauce,
I think you'll agree 'twas enough for first course.

Then came the Dessert—this all fruits did comprise,
Though certainly none of a very large size.

The plates were supplied from the Birch tree's own leaves,
While the Woodsorrell's cup the bright nectar receives.

Veronica tasted of all the delicacies before her, and feeling refreshed, determined to invite the Fairy to come to her, in order that she might express her thanks for the feast which had been placed before her. But she hardly knew in what manner to address the Queen of so magnificent a palace. Long she pondered over it, without any words coming to her aid, when all at once she heard around her a rustling of soft wings, the music of a tiny bell, and suddenly the room became a blaze of light, so that poor Veronica was obliged to hide her face. Presently she heard a sweet voice, saying :

“ I am the Queen of the Birchen Tree,
Be not afraid to look on me.”

Veronica opened her eyes, and there beheld a tiny Fairy, dressed in brown and silver, like the stem of the Birch. She wore on her head a cap made of a green leaf, and in her hand she carried a drooping branch, with a bright star at the end of it. Strange to say, Veronica did not feel alarmed, but gazed for some time at this lovely creature, till the Fairy sang again :

“ I am the Queen of the Birchen Tree,
What did'st thou wish to say to me ?”

Then the little child spoke. “ Oh, beautiful Fairy, I wished to thank you for the entertainment you have given me.”

“ You are a good child, Veronica,” replied the Fairy, “ and therefore I have allowed you to enter my palace, and even to fly up to its roof, and to taste the Fairies’ food, which no mortal has yet done. I have watched over you since your birth, though your parents have not known me, and I have been ever pleased with your conduct.”

The Fairy paused, and Veronica feared she was about to fly away again, but she sat down on the couch of lichen, and bid Veronica do the same, and then spoke again : “ Little child, listen to my words. I want you to promise me faithfully that you will always endeavour to prevent the felling of trees in this park and forest. Many years ago, your great-grandfather, by cutting down and destroying my palace, (for I am the Queen of the Woodland Fairies,) so displeased us, that we deserted the place for some time. Now we have returned, for we think the Prince, your father, seems kind, and will not treat us so harshly. And I have watched you and observed that you are a good little child, so I determined to admit you into my palace, and to obtain from you this promise. If you keep it, I and my sisters will be friends of your family for ever ;—but if it is broken, sad disasters will befall you. Will you attend to my wishes ? ”

“ Yes ! ” said Veronica.

“ Then I must summon my court to hear your words.”

Touching a silver bell with her wand, in a moment a cloud of Fairies descended to the ground, and surrounded the astonished Veronica.—They were all dressed in the leaves and the bark of their respective trees. There was the Fairy of the dark green Fir, with a robe like the red stem of that tree. The Fairies of the Larch, the Elm, and the Beech, in fact all the trees of the forest.—Each carried a wand, but the Queen alone had a star at the end of her wand. As soon as they had all assembled, the Queen said, “Veronica, repeat these words after me:”—“I, Veronica, do faithfully and truly promise, to do all in my power to prevent the Prince my father from cutting down or injuring the trees in this park and forest;—and I will keep this promise, even though it may cost me trouble and annoyance.”

Veronica repeated the words distinctly.—Then the Queen embraced her, and taking a small ring off her own finger, she gave it to the little girl. It was made of one emerald, beautiful to view.

The Queen then said, “This ring can never come off your finger unless you break your

promise—then it will vanish, and you will never see it again. It will be invisible to all except yourself, and remind you of your vow, if you are tempted to break it. Now, farewell, good little Girl—come to me if ever you are in difficulty. Knock five times on the stem of my tree, and I will not fail to answer you—but do not tell your father and mother of your visit to Fairy Land, or of the promise which you have given—perhaps they may know it some day, but if *you* tell them the spell will be broken, your ring will melt away, and I can never see you more.”

The Fairies now began to sing a lullaby, and to fan Veronica with their soft wings, till she fell into a sweet sleep. When she opened her eyes, she found herself lying on the grass under the tree, with her faithful dog watching by her. She sprang up quickly, and began to retrace her steps towards home, for the sun was setting, and she thought her mother would feel anxious at her long absence. When she arrived at the garden gates, she met a servant, who had been sent in search of her. She

was obliged to look at her little ring very often, to assure herself that her visit to the Fairy Queen was not a dream.—Weeks passed on, and Veronica had almost forgotten her promise, until one morning she heard her father order his horses, to be ready directly, for he was going to superintend the cutting down of some trees in the forest.—“Ah, dear Father,” she exclaimed, “pray do not have any trees cut down. I ask it as the greatest favour.”

“But why, my child?” he said, surprised at her earnest manner; “I never saw you so anxious for me to spare the trees before—what harm can it do? I want the trees, and there are many more in the forest.”

“Yes, I know that, father dear, but still I beg you not to cut them.”

“But what is your reason, child? tell me your reason.”

“No, I cannot do that,” she murmured.

“Why not? I desire you to tell me.”

“Dear father, I am very sorry to disobey you, and I hope you won’t be very angry; but I cannot tell you.”

“ You are a silly naughty child, and you don’t know what you are talking about. Go back to your nursery: and don’t presume to interfere with me again.”

So saying the Prince strode out of the castle, mounted his horse, and rode away. Poor Veronica burst into tears, for her father was never angry with her, and she felt it deeply—“ Oh! Fairy Queen,” she exclaimed, “ this is all your doing.”

She looked at her ring as she spoke, and there, in small bright letters, she saw the words, “ *Good Girl.*” After she had gazed at them for a little while, they vanished. “ Well, I am glad the Queen is pleased with me,” she said. But still she felt unhappy, so she determined to go to the Birch tree, for she remembered the Fairy’s words, “ Come to me, if ever you are in difficulty.”

She set off, accompanied by her dog, and soon reached the tree. She knocked boldly five times on the stem, and then she perceived a crack in the bark, and heard the Fairy’s voice saying, “ What does Veronica want with the Birchen Queen?”

The little girl sat down at the foot of the tree, and then spoke, "Kind Fairy, I am very unhappy! My father is angry with me; and I have done no good, for he *will* cut the trees."

"I know all about it, my child," said the Queen. "Did you not see the words on your ring?"

"Yes, and I was glad, but I fear my petition has not been granted, for the Prince, my father, was *so* angry."

"Do you remember your promise, and the words you used?"

"Yes."

"What were they?"

"To keep my promise, even though it may cost me trouble and annoyance."

"Well, this is trouble and annoyance, but still you kept your promise, and I am pleased with you. Do not be sad. I know that your father has *not* cut the trees, and he is no longer angry. Go, and meet him on his return, and when you are tried again, always look at your ring; do your best, and trust to me.—Farewell."

The crack in the tree closed, and Veronica was left alone. She remained a moment or two thinking over the Fairy's words, and then walked home—rather slowly, for she was wondering what her father would say to her.

He met her at the door, and kissed her kindly, saying, "Well, my little girl, you will now be happy. I have not cut the trees. I spoil you, but to say the truth, I fancied when I went into the forest, that a Fairy was looking at me from every tree, and so I ordered them to be left standing.—Are you glad, little Veronica?"

"Oh, yes, dear father," she cried, springing into his arms, "so glad, and so much obliged to you. I thank you a thousand times."

"I believe you are in league with the Fairies," he said, laughing; and then left her with her little heart full of joy.

Very often after this, the Prince threatened to cut down trees, but Veronica always pleaded for them, and generally succeeded. At length, when many months had passed by, the Fairy Queen appeared to the Prince as he was riding alone in the forest, and told him of the promise

which Veronica had given. Then he was very much pleased with his little girl, and he too pledged his word to the Fairy that he would not injure the trees.

Veronica always kept her ring, and often paid a visit to the Birch Tree Palace, and the Fairies lived on in peace and happiness, and were for ever the true friends of Veronica and her family.

THE END.







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